News Article

NRA Makes Rare Statement Against Trump Admin Over Alex Pretti Shooting

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prosecutor warning that approaching law enforcement with a gun could justify a fatal police response, saying such statements risk "demonizing law-abiding citizens" as the nation reels from the killing of a man in Minneapolis by a U.S. border agent.

The NRA was responding to remarks by Bill Essayli, the first assistant U.S. attorney for the Central District of California, who said that "if you approach law enforcement with a gun, there is a high likelihood they will be legally justified in shooting you," adding, "Don't do it." In a statement, the gun-rights group called that view "dangerous and wrong," urging public officials to refrain from broad generalizations and to wait for the outcome of a full investigation into Alex Pretti's death.

The organization has also spoken out against "radical progressive politicians like Tim Walz," accusing them of inciting "violence against law enforcement officers who are simply trying to do their jobs."

Newsweek has contacted Essayli and the NRA, via email outside of normal working hours, for comment.

The comments highlight tensions between prominent gun-rights advocates and federal officials over when armed presence in public meets legal thresholds for deadly force.

It comes after 37-year-old Alex Jeffrey Pretti was shot and killed by federal immigration officers on Saturday in Minneapolis.

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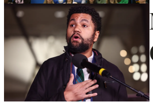

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This is the second fatal shooting involving federal officers in the city within weeks

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Enforcement (ICE) officer Jonathan Ross on January 7. There have been widespread daily protests in the Twin Cities since.

What To Know

Essayli had shared a post from the DHS about Saturday's shooting with the caption: "If you approach law enforcement with a gun, there is a high likelihood they will be legally justified in shooting you. Don't do it!"

The NRA responded: "This sentiment from the First Assistant U.S. Attorney for the Central District of California is dangerous and wrong. Responsible public voices should be awaiting a full investigation, not making generalizations and demonizing law-abiding citizens."

Similarly, Gun Owners of America, a gun rights advocacy and lobbying organization, replied to Essayli’s post saying it "condemn[s) the untoward comments."

"The Second Amendment protects Americans' right to bear arms while protesting—a right the federal government must not infringe upon," the organization added.

Essayli hit back, saying the group was "adding words to mischaracterize [his] statement."

"I never said it's legally justified to shoot law-abiding concealed carriers. My comment addressed agitators approaching law enforcement with a gun and refusing to disarm," he said.

"My advice stands: If you value your life, do not aggressively approach law enforcement while armed," Essayli added. "If they reasonably perceive a threat and you fail to immediately disarm, they are legally permitted to use deadly force."

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin said in a statement that, on Saturday, federal officers were conducting an operation as part of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown and fired "defensive shots" after a man with a handgun approached them and "violently resisted" when officers tried to disarm him. The officer who shot Pretti is an eight-year Border Patrol veteran, federal officials said.

In a bystander video obtained by the AP, protesters can be heard blowing whistles and shouting profanities at agents on Nicollet Avenue. The video shows an officer shoving a person wearing a brown jacket, who reaches out for a man and the two embrace. The officer shoves the man in his chest and the two fall back.

The video then shows three officers surrounding the man, soon growing to at least seven officers. One officer appears on the man's back while another strikes him in the chest. As officers try to bring the man's arms behind his back, he appears to resist. An officer with a canister strikes the man near his head several times.

A shot rings out, though it's not clear where it came from. Multiple officers back off after the shot, more shots are heard, and the man lies motionless on the street.

What People Are Saying

The NRA said in a post on X: “For months, radical progressive politicians like Tim Walz have incited violence against law enforcement officers who are simply trying to do their jobs. Unsurprisingly, these calls to dangerously interject oneself into legitimate law-enforcement activities have ended in violence, tragically resulting in injuries and fatalities. As there is with any officer-involved shooting, there will be a robust and comprehensive investigation that takes place to determine if the use of force was justified. As we await these facts and gain a clearer understanding, we urge the political voices to lower the temperature to ensure their constituents and law enforcement officers stay safe.”

President Donald Trump on Truth Social: "This is the gunman’s gun, loaded (with two additional full magazines!), and ready to go—What is that all about? Where are the local Police? Why weren’t they allowed to protect ICE Officers? The Mayor and the Governor called them off? It is stated that many of these Police were not allowed to do their job, that ICE had to protect themselves—Not an easy thing to do! Why does Ilhan Omar have $34 Million Dollars in her account? And where are the Tens of Billions of Dollars that have been stolen from the once Great State of Minnesota? We are there because of massive Monetary Fraud, with Billions of Dollars missing, and Illegal Criminals that were allowed to infiltrate the State through the Democrats’ Open Border Policy. We want the money back, and we want it back, NOW."

Adding: "Those Fraudsters who stole the money are going to jail, where they belong! This is no different from a really big Bank Robbery. Much of what you're witnessing is a COVER UP for this Theft and Fraud. The Mayor and the Governor are inciting Insurrection, with their pompous, dangerous, and arrogant rhetoric! Instead, these sanctimonious political fools should be looking for the Billions of Dollars that has been stolen from the people of Minnesota, and the United States of America. LET OUR ICE PATRIOTS DO THEIR JOB! 12,000 Illegal Alien Criminals, many of them violent, have been arrested and taken out of Minnesota. If they were still there, you would see something far worse than you are witnessing today!

Gun Owners of America said: "We are saddened by the loss of life in Minneapolis, Minnesota earlier today during a federal law-enforcement operation. Because details remain limited and facts are still emerging, it is essential that the Justice Department conduct a complete, transparent, and prompt investigation so the public can fully understand what occurred and maintain confidence in the rule of law.

"Furthermore, we condemn the untoward comments of Bill Essayli. Federal agents are not 'highly likely' to be 'legally justified' in 'shooting' concealed carry licensees who approach while lawfully carrying a firearm. The Second Amendment protects Americans' right to bear arms while protesting—a right the federal government must not infringe upon.

"Finally, the Left must stop antagonizing ICE and Border Patrol agents who are taking criminals off the streets and play a crucial role in protecting communities and upholding the rule of law."

Essayli responded: "You're adding words to mischaracterize my statement. I never said it's legally justified to shoot law-abiding concealed carriers. My comment addressed agitators approaching law enforcement with a gun and refusing to disarm.

"I come from a community where multiple LEOs have been killed by firearms in the line of duty. They put their lives on the line every day to keep our communities safe. The left is playing a very dangerous game by encouraging armed confrontations with police.

enforcement while armed. If they reasonably perceive a threat and you fail to immediately disarm, they are legally permitted to use deadly force."

What Happens Next

Protests and public scrutiny of federal immigration enforcement in Minneapolis have continued in the wake of two fatal shootings.

Minnesota officials have said the state will take the lead in investigating the shooting, though jurisdictional disputes with federal authorities remain unresolved.

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People mourn at a makeshift memorial in the area where 37-year-old Alex Pretti was sho federal immigration agents earlier in the day in Minne... **Read More** | *ROBERTO SCHMIDT*

Update 1/25/26 10:54 a.m. ET: This story has been updated with a statement from the NRA.

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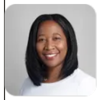

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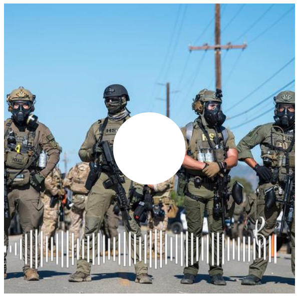

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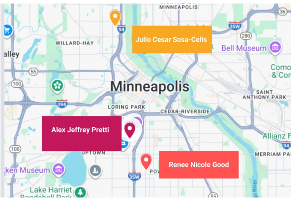
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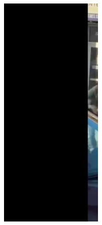

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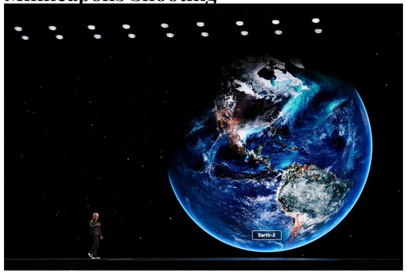

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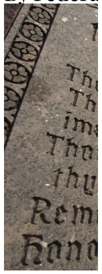

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